



National parks

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The Channel Islands



Peter Howorth

On a clear day, the Channel Islands—that wind-swept group of islands just off the coast of southern California—appear to be only a stone's throw away from the mainland, and in sun they seem to beckon us nearer yet. But when the weather shifts and fog swirls in soft haloes around them, the islands recede into the distance, assuming a brooding and forbidding countenance.

Accessible only by boat, the islands are miles yet eons away from the crowds, the noise, the frenzy. Birds and seals are the only throngs

here, the murmur of wind and waves the only sounds, and a change of weather the only restive element in the serenity of island life.

Once in the Santa Barbara Channel, we become an integral part of that strange island world, whose beauty lies in stark simplicity. One with nature, we are exposed and vulnerable to its laws, quixotic though they sometimes seem to be. Although sunny days are frequent, there is always the chance that a fog may descend or a storm may suddenly break. And the wind must always have its wanton way.

But these elements only enhance the mysterious elegance of the islands. And when the waves swell, the breakers crash, and the foghorn blares its melancholy warning, we realize that there is one thing here that is more pervasive, more dominant than the weather. It molds the islands, affects the habits of the island life, and nourishes all. That tyrant and benefactor is the sea—and its dominion is total.

Excerpted from Channel Islands: The Story Behind the Scenery, written by Peter C. Howorth; KC Publications, Box 14883, Las Vegas, NV 89114. \$3.95 postpaid.



Thomas Cowell

The whiskers of the harbor seal opposite are so sensitive that they can pick up sound vibrations underwater; and his huge eyes allow him to spot prey in dim ocean light. The nudibranch at top is an elegant sea slug with a mane of exposed gills. Above, the island kelpfish camouflages itself with color. And, at right, the strawberry anemone looks like a flower, but is actually a voracious animal.



R.A. Clevenger